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IN A TUSCAN VILLA,

AND OTHER POEMS.

BY

HARRIET L. CHILDE-PEMBERTON,

AUTHOR OF "BIRDIE: A TALE OF CHILD LIFE," "PRINCE," ETC.



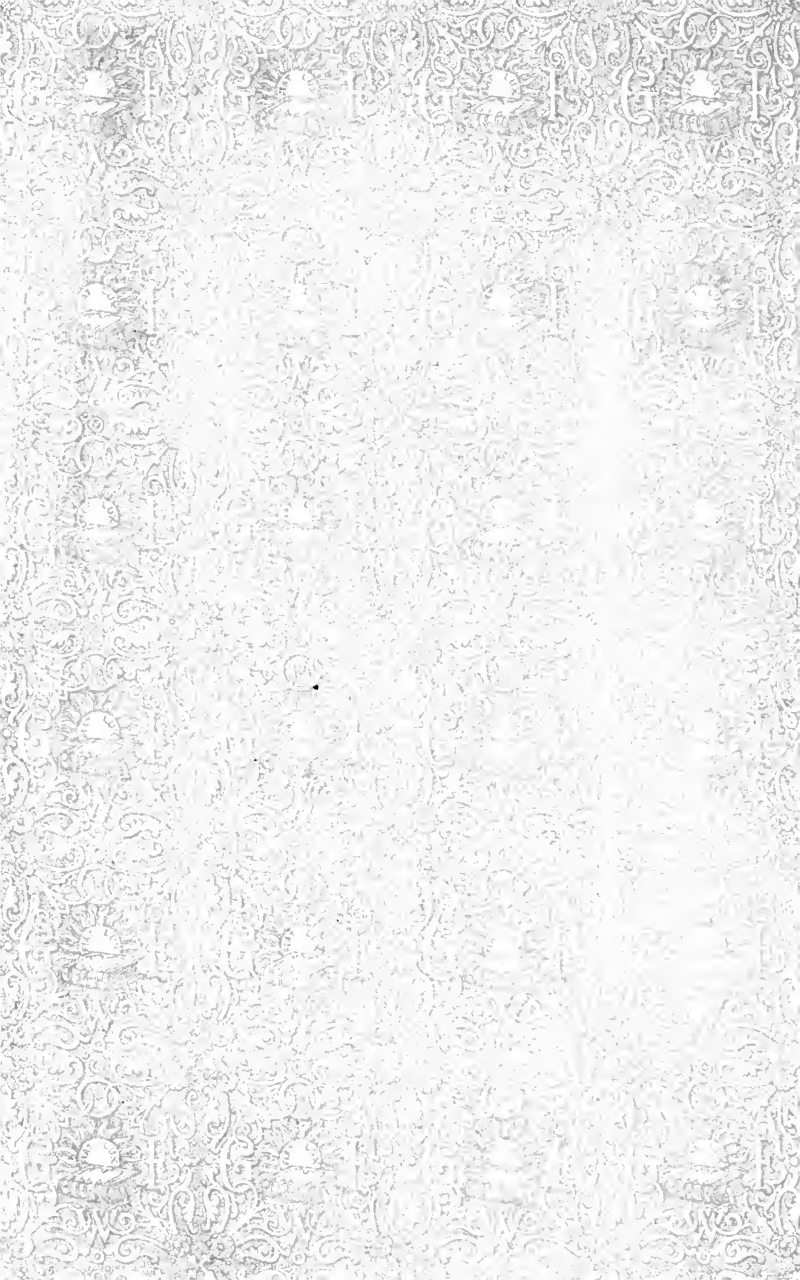
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IN A TUSCAN VILLA.

A Monologue.

PART I.

TOGETHER.

I.

BETWIXT me and my Past, the seas are set,
The links are cut by which my life was led ;
Much I have learnt, needs must that I forget,
And take new knowledge to my heart instead.

Think you that I had left my English home
To live my days here on Italian soil,
Unless strong Love beguiled my feet to roam,
Love, neither race nor clime can change or spoil ?

It was for you, you only that I came,
With boundless faith in what strong Love can
teach,
For you did I accept a foreign name,
And train my tongue to unfamiliar speech !

Nay, thank me not ! Your love towards me sufficed,
Sacred and precious with a worth untold !
Nothing have I renounced or sacrificed
But you have paid me back a thousand fold !

That you should love me, as I know you do,
What need I seek, possess, believe in, more ?
Since I have found my creed in love for you,
And that just fills the measure of my store !

II.

So, I am yours in sunshine's glow
When all the world looks sweet and fair,
Yours, when the shades lie long and low,
And looming clouds a storm declare ;
Yea, yours to follow though you dwelt
Where death and ruin should daily throng,
And I shall feel as I have felt
Yours, only yours, my whole life long !

Time was, my soul had scorned to merge
Her freedom in another's will ;
Since reason then would boldly urge
No passion can completely fill

The thing that marks us each from all,
The *I* that yet remaineth such
Though circumstance may mar and maul,
And seem to change at every touch.
Now, think you, I would stoop to plead
What is, had never right to be ?

Let reason here to love concede,
Since naught remains of only me
Sufficing self, apart from you.
To know the truth of life complete,
Halve it ; 'tis better so than two ;
This have I proven and found it true,
True, and immeasurably sweet !

III.

See where the cypress-trees are riven,—a gap
The distance fills,
The fair white city lying in the lap
Of purple hills ;

A beauteous model, delicately laid
On background blue,
And wreathed with foliage,—green of every shade—
Which I look through.

A bit of choicest Della-Robbia ware
As one may see,
Within my garden hanging in mid air,
And all for me!

You did not place the picture there, you say,
That lies beneath ;
You did not mould the city, nor did lay
The foliage wreath.

No. But you taught my heart the worth of all
That's Florentine ;
First, in this garden bound me fast in thrall,
Then made it mine !

IV.

Yes, I do love it all ! I love your city,
Spoilt though she be
With foreign speech and manners,—more's the pity
For such as she !

I love her great red Dome,—her lily tower
And antique mart,
Her marbles and mosaics and all her dower
Of varied art !

I love your people with their soft, sweet speech
And courteous ways,
And pride that glories in the works that reach
To olden days !

I love your country—one vast vineyard round ;—
I love your sky
Bright with the lustre that is only found
In Italy !

I love this garden, blest for me, so blest
With things divine !
And more than all I love you, Oh, my best !
My Florentine !

V.

Do you think that you will love me
As you say you do to-day,
Setting none on earth above me,
When mine eyes shall lose their lustre,
And the golden curls that cluster
Round my brow, shall turn to grey ?

Will you listen for my laughter,
 Counting it the sweetest sound,
In the time that cometh after,
 When the music of the bell
 Shall not ring so true and well,
No false note therein be found ?

Shall you always seek my presence
 As you care to seek it now ?
Finding it the very essence
 Of your life and of your being,
 Nothing hearing, nothing seeing
Faith toward me would disallow ?

You would leave, you say, replying,
 Till the gold has turned to grey,
And the change there 's no denying
 (Own it though we all be loth !)
 Shall have touched, not one, but both ;—
You will answer me that day.

VI.

A bird is singing aloud to me,
A little brown bird in the ilex-tree,

And her song is ever of you, of you,
My Love ! so noble and strong and true,
For she saw you coming and watched you pass
Under the cypress and over the grass,
And her song floats forth on the warm, blue air,
Bearing this burden everywhere,
Over the vineyard and ilex grove
Back to my feet, the name I love,
The little brown bird in the ilex-tree
Singing aloud and alone for me,—

Emilio ! Emilio ! Emilio !

Down on the slope the corn is growing,
Flecked with the warm, grey shadows flowing,
Tulips of red in the young, green wheat,
There where the vines and the mulberry meet ;
Whisper the breezes that name so sweet,
And the flowerets nod and the name repeat,

Emilio ! Emilio ! Emilio !

Whatever descends from the sphere around,
Whatever comes up from the blooming ground,
It doth but speak to my heart of this,
Its sole concern and its perfect bliss ;

For nothing to me is real and true,
And I care for nothing, that breathes not you !
Emilio ! Emilio ! Emilio !

VII.

Oh my Love ! must we part so soon,
Or ever the roses and lilies die ?
Part, or ever the rising moon
Has traced her orbit from May to June ?
Part in the spring-time, you and I ?

Oh my Love ! what matters it now
The world should proffer to you its claim ?
Smooth those lines from out of your brow,
And kiss me, darling, and tell me how
You cling to your love,—not fame !

Oh my Love ! is there aught you miss
Here in our home you needs must go ?
Something you value beyond my kiss,
Something that spoileth your perfect bliss,—
Something you seek and I may not know ?

Nay, my Love ! For if go you must,
I will not question or seek to see ;
You shall not murmur : “ Her love was just
A season’s pleasure, devoid of trust,
Made for herself—not me ! ”

Go, my Love ! and of this be sure,
(Whatever our cynical teachers scout)
No love, so strong, nor ever so pure,
Hath power to battle, believe, endure,
That shields an unworthy doubt !

VIII.

Oh best beloved ! I know you so much mine,
Your lips, your life,—I leave them wholly free ;
Our parting kiss shall be of faith the sign,
Pure as yon fount and boundless as the sea !

Good-bye ! Good-bye ! New morrows fraught with
bliss
Soon o’er these hills, for both of us shall rise ;
Good-bye ! Good-bye ! I waft you one more kiss,
Ere widening distance hide you from mine eyes !

PART II

PARTED.

I.

JUST a week since he departed,
One long week that seems like ten !
Dull and lonely and downhearted
I have tried to make employment
Take the place of sweet enjoyment,
So to fill the hours since then.

I have culled the yellow roses
Blooming in the southern ray,
And have filled the house with posies,
And with gifts have sought to lighten
Labour's burden, and to brighten
Somewhat of a drudge's day.

Now at last the week has brought me
Slowly to its looked-for end,
And this morning I bethought me,

When we parted, how he said :
“ Ere the passing week has sped
Homewards I my way shall wend.”

So, to-day I feel it surely
Hitherwards his way will be,
For this morn he rose up early,—
Who’s that passing by the thicket ?
Coming yonder through the wicket ?—
What ? A messenger for me ?—

II.

What am I doing, lying prone
By the terrace wall on the cold grey stone ?
What has happened ? Did some one come
With a message that seemed to strike me dumb
And blind and deaf in a single stroke
With a feeling as if my heartstrings broke ?
I cannot remember. My brain is numb.

What was the message they brought me ?—
what ?—

A single sentence : “ Emilio shot.”—

Emilio shot and Emilio dead,
Could it be that the thing I read?—
Pshaw! I had fallen asleep in the sun,
Had walked too far and was overdone,
And the horror was nothing more, I deem,
Than the fevered course of a mid-day dream.

What do I see goes rustling there
Over the pavement and down the stair?
Only a leaf? Nay, surely not;
A message for me: "Emilio shot!"
Here is the thing that I read before,
Cruel and brief, no less, no more!
A morsel of paper, yellow and creased,
Stamped by the post-office; this at least
Is not the freak of a dreaming brain.
What does it mean? Can none explain?

III.

Dead! dead! dead!
Dead, my Love?—Nay, it cannot be;
To-day he is coming again to me,
The week is ended, so come he must,
For that was his word, and his word I trust;
He will not go back from the thing he said

Some other Emilio than mine is meant,
In the message so hastily hitherward sent,
Some other poor wife in the city perhaps,
Will weep to-night for her husband's lapse,
'Tis meant for another, beyond a doubt ;
Take it away, and find her out.

Dead ! dead ! dead, you insist !
Hearken to me, and then desist.
Here is a proof as clear as day,
It cannot be, as you seem to say,—
The message itself is proof complete,—
(This I aver and dare repeat,)—
It cometh from Nice, and he was not there
I know of a truth ! Nay, how you stare !
In the face of my answer you yet persist ?

IV.

Dead ! dead ! dead !
Must I accept it true, at last ?
His love for me a joy that is past,

Past and over and lost to sight,
Gone from my life and ended quite !
Silent—there by the azure sea—
That heart pulsating for only me !
Lost, the love that was wholly mine !
Dead, my beautiful Florentine !
Oh my dear one ! what had we done
Our lives should finish ere scarce begun ?

Mine, my darling, is ended too ;
I cannot exist apart from you,
And God in Heaven must hear my cry,
And pity my pain and let me die !

V.

Tell me again, that I may understand,
In clearer language what your hints imply ;—
Not only dead,—but dead by his own hand ?
It cannot be—for wherefore should he die ?

You hold him dead, and further you believe
The deed his own ? I say it is not so ;
Some murderer, haply, did his death achieve,
But dead and by his own intention,—no !

Men do not dash the cup of life away
When it is filled with sweetness to the brim,
He, least of all, need loathe the light of day,
For life with me, was very sweet to him.

Possessed of all that gives full worth to youth,
Love crowning all, men do not seek to die ;
And so, whatever else be proven truth,
This, at the least, is stamped an envious lie.

VI.

Still—(maybe with best intention)
You would have me to believe,
He, from cause he dare not mention,
Framed his conduct to deceive ?
I concede you hold your reason
Valid,—since you wish me well,
But to *me* the thought is treason,
Hateful, more than words can tell !
For if I should choose to hearken,
Crediting what you make out,
All my soul would quickly darken
With the poisonous mist of doubt.

Oh my noble one ! my peerless !
Truthful lips and steadfast eyes,
Far too strong and all too fearless
Thus to stoop to dastard lies !
Pardon, if one instant merely
I allowed a doubt to flash,
Since the next, my vision clearly
Gave me strength that doubt to dash ;

Take not this as proof of swerving
From my faith's profession made ;
What I said of love's deserving
Word nor action has gainsaid,
And I hold that love unworthy
Of its heavenly origin,—
Just a thing of earth and earthy,—
That can harbour doubt within.

VII.

Drooping, alas ! and well-nigh dead
My lilies of purple and roses red,
And the sky is grey and the moon is cold,
And the cypress-trees are ragged and old,
And my birds are mute, and the screech-owl's wail
Cleaveth the silence that broods o'er the vale ;

Out of the east there cometh a breeze
Whispering sadly among the trees ;—
Much to each other, perchance, they say,
But only one word for *me* have they,—
Emilio ! Emilio ! Emilio !

Over the fair, white city, sleeping,
Down by the river a mist is creeping,
Like to an army of spectres stealing
Out of their graves ; and anon comes pealing
The far-off chime of a convent bell, ,
And the sound to me is ever a knell
Tolling the name that I love so well,—
Emilio ! Emilio ! Emilio !

Whether or no I weep for you,
The sun will rise in the burning blue,
The lark in the cornfields surely wake,
Whether or no my heart shall break ;
Then oh, my Love ! come back to my sight,
Come in the flash of the dawning light,
Come and stand in the sunlight there,
And laugh a little at my despair,
And kiss the teardrops out of mine eyes,—
Sorrow arrested by sweet surprise,—

And play with my hair as you used to do, .
Praising its silk and its golden hue ;
Come and claim me as yours alone,
None other may worship and none can own,
Come ! I am wistfully waiting for you,
Oh my Loved one, tender and true—
Emilio ! Emilio ! Emilio !

VIII.

The heavens are silent,—and the world goes by
The same as if
Hearts did not break and corses did not lie
All cold and stiff !

I saw a gold-beaked blackbird sit and sing
Above a tomb,
In blithest mood, as there were no such thing
As mourners dumb ;

And roses twined and bloomed about the stone
As rich and gay
As it had been an arbour raised alone
For lovers' play !

But I am all unstrung and out of tune
To Nature's mirth.

Then oh, my Father ! let me die—die soon
And leave this earth !

PART III.

ALONE.

I.

I WONDER if it sometimes be not gain
To let a truth die in a nameless grave,
Rather than drag her forth, all fraught with pain,
The fret and torment of the light to brave ?

That she should closer draw the veil a space,
I know were best for those for whom Truth
comes,
(With good intent) uncovering her scarred face,
When sight of her but petrifies and numbs !

Think you the facts these letters bring to light
Of my Emilio,—just because 'tis *he*,
I would not rather they were lost to sight,
Sunk fathoms deep below the silent sea ?

Yet true beyond all question? Well, what then?

If you had ever loved as I loved him,
You would not surely wish your god midst men,
Should stand so *you* might see his glory dim?

And so, you think I doubt—because I see
(Proved plain beyond the power to controvert)
Things were not once as I believed them be,
And as I then had boldness to assert.

This is not doubt. 'Tis but to recognize
My own mistake!—the error of my creed
Being this: I saw, with all-believing eyes,
A god, where was a very man indeed!

And I did love him! Aye, and love him still,
Despite those letters none the less,—no whit;
And I have judged it all,—the good and ill,—
Nor do I seek to censure or acquit.

Only, (I pray you mark, for having heard,
You will not hold my faith of lesser worth)
I now do love the man—the man who erred,
As men needs must who grope about this
earth!

II.

Oh my Love ! shall I ever know

Your last resolve in the deed you did ?

All the shame and the passionate woe

That tortured you ?—I who loved you so !

Will it be always, always hid ?

Did you, I wonder, account it vain

My love for you that was all your own ?

Count it a thing in the sunshine grown,

But prone to droop in a wash of rain,

And fit to snap at the merest strain ?—

This, methinks, is the hardest pain

I bear, for your sake, alone !

If you had known and had only come !

What had I done you should hold me weak ?

So you chose confess the collected sum

Of your sins to me—so you chose be dumb,—

I had never the right to speak !

I swear it, Dear—had you come to me,

Covered all over with slime and sludge,

Branded,—shorn of the smallest plea,

(If it were possible such could be !)

I never had stooped to judge ;

I would but have taken your hand in mine,
I would but have looked in your eyes,
And writ in my gaze you had read the sign
That Love is truly a thing divine,

By its surest token and sweetest prize,—
(Though hopes may wither and hearts will break !)
Forgiveness of error for Love's own sake !

III.

What means it, this perplexing life of ours
So grey of hue,
Yet riven with light that gives us golden hours
When flashing through ?

Just like to yonder olive-trees that seem
One level tint
Of lowest colour, till some sudden gleam
Of glorious glint,

Shoots earthward, slantways, bearing in its rays
Commingle hues ;
And lo ! the slope lies in a rainbow haze
Of reds and blues !

And pulses beat beneath the sunshine's touch!—

And so are they

Our lifetime's sun-gleams, and their influence such,

Where'er they play.

Straight down from Heaven they come, and then
we know

Our lives are new,

Full of fresh vigour, rarely bright!—but oh!

They are so few!

IV.

Why was this power to love, so exquisite,

Within me placed,

Why this intense desire to give,—so it

Must run to waste?

Why was I given this ceaseless, quivering need

Myself to spend,

In proof of love and as love's sweetest meed,

(No other end.)

Why, if, when all is said and done, no soul
 To me is given
For whom I lavishly dispense the whole
 Great gift of Heaven ?

Or, bitterer still, when having once been given,
 A moment left,
The next, withdrawn, and my poor love storm-
 driven,
 Stands all bereft !

Others I see whose love has fullest scope,
 And yet the line
Which circles round their patience, faith and hope
 Is less than mine !

Why are the gifts of life assorted so ?
 Strangely uneven !—
Ah !—since not here,—perchance that I shall know
 The truth in Heaven.

V.

I feel it so. This love that here began,
Cut short, and thus bereft of meaning here,
I will not hold it void of any plan ;
It was too good for that. Some other sphere
Is kept, oh best-beloved ! for me and you,
Where we may twine the broken threads anew.

For naught is aimless, least of all our lives,
And naught is wasted, least of all our love,
Only, with God, the greatest He contrives
He wills shall find its full result above.
And so I wait,—and when He deems it meet
The meaning of life's Love will stand complete !

LOVE'S PRESAGE.

I.

SHE stood and watched the driving rain
 That dripped along the upper eaves,
 And slid athwart the window pane,
 And pattered through the laurel leaves ;
 She saw the brook a river grown,
 A brook the gutter ; by the pond
 The wind had laid the rushes prone,
 And all was desolate beyond.
 She said : "'Tis nigh,
 Our meeting-hour,
 Though seas run high,
 And storm-clouds lower."

The wind amid the pine-trees roared,
 And round the solid chimney-stack,
 Behind the gaping wainscoat-board
 It shrieked for joy to find a crack,

And shook the door with sudden jolt,
And backward swept with lessening din,
Then wrenched the lattice, burst the bolt,
As it would force an entrance in.

“Yet would I go!”

Was still her cry,

“Though light be low

Or wind be high!”

“Dear Love,” they said, and answered soft
As she had been a sickly child,

“You cannot see or copse or croft

For blinding rain that driveth wild ;

You cannot hear a human call

Three paces from the open door,

Then wait,—the hurricane will fall

And sunshine light the way once more.”

She said : “Dear friends,

Ye do not know ;

'Tis Wilfrid sends,

And I would go.

“ If I should wait until the gale
Sink to the sobbing of a child,
If I should wait till rain and hail
To clearer skies are reconciled,
'Twere all as one I did not hear,
'Twere all as one I did not see,
'Twere all as one his presence near
Had never passed to summon me.
Ye would not will
That I should fail,”
(She shuddered chill !)
“ For gloom or gale ?

“ Nay, tell me not 'tis five years back
He went away,—that all engrossed
He followeth still the explorer's track,
And some there be who count him lost,
And some there be who doubt his faith,
And some there be who deem him dead
For I have seen him,—not his wraith,
He liveth and he comes,” she said.
“ Though winds be high
And tides be low
And I should die,
Yet would I go !

“ Dear Father ! ’tis no fancy’s freak,
Nor am I mad, nor am I wrong,
Nor would I have you judge me weak,
For Love and Faith have made me strong ;
And so I brave this tempest’s rush,
So surely, surely shall we greet,
But so I bide the after hush,
So surely shall we never meet !
It is not I
That doometh this,
Nor know I why,—
Yet so it is ! ”

Her father blessed her where she stood,
Her mother kissed her, weeping wild,
Her sister said : “ For ill or good
We may not cross her thus beguiled ;
So be she fancy Wilfrid call,
She will not live if she remain,
Nor would I dare, in spite of all,
To counsel we had best detain.
The storm unspent ?
Nay, mother mine,
’Twere best she went,—
She will but pine !

“ Go, little Sister, as you list,
Go, meet your Wilfrid by the sea,
And when ye two again have kissed,
Return with him to home and me.
God have you in His keeping, Sweet,
And grant your faith be more than proved,
Aye! give you something more complete
Than crowns the bliss of most beloved ! ”
The sun declined
With ne’er a glow,—
Wild wailed the wind,
Now loud, now low.

II.

There was a ship lay labouring on the sea,—
There stood a crowd of watchers on the shore,
And ever and anon all tremblingly
They might discern the pleading rocket soar.

Yet scarcely this ; a dense and driving rain
With clouds above, below with billows blent,
Like one vast curtain stretched from sky to main,
And in its folds the struggling ship was pent.

They could not tell what build the vessel was,
They could not tell the colours that she bore,
And who might dare to risk in such a cause,
For lives already lost, another score ?

'Tis easy talking ! But when seas run high,
And skies are black and western winds are
loose,
And boats are less than cockle-shells, to try
Is simply courting death,—and where's the
use ?

I do not know ; and yet I feel *some* good
Is born of every effort to be brave,
Though wisdom judge it all misunderstood,
And though it lay the struggler in his grave !

Some good is born. One watcher deemed it so,
Who scanned the storm apart a little space,
Else wherefore did she cry : " Will no one go ?
Leave prudence and put pity in its place ! "

I do not think she thought of Wilfrid then,
Nor did she dwell on wherefore she was there ;
Her soul was centred on those drowning men,
And all her pity given to their despair.

“Have ye no boats?” she cried, “nor any oars?

Nor any men with stalwart arms to row?

Nor any pity in those hearts of yours?

I would I were a man, for I would go!

“Aye! I would go! ’Twere shame they should
believe

Not one would stretch a helping hand, not one!

And if ye save, what sweeter thing to achieve,—

And if ye fail, a noble deed is done.”

And thus they caught her spirit, and they sped

To set a boat a-battling with the sea,

For all they knew those were as good as dead

They strove to save, and they as much might
be.

And all her soul in following them was spent.

She had no thought of Wilfrid—where was he,

No thought of her strange summons, what it
meant,

Or why he did not meet her by the sea.

But her strong soul was prisoned in a frame
Too weak to hold it, and this yearning brake
The fragile outworks—and the vital flame
Sped forth a limitless career to take.

And thus she died, still watching on the cliff,
While every man aboard that ship went
down,
And on the calmer morrow, stark and stiff
Upon the beach was Wilfrid's body thrown.

III.

The gale was hushed with sudden calm,
And hushed was her sweet voice no less ;
The closed eye, the folded palm
Showed she was past or storm or stress.
They stood beside the silent clay
And wept—as human hearts must weep
When treasured lives are taken away,
To leave us counterfeited sleep.

Poor parents stricken
Thus bereft,
No grief can quicken
What is left !

White violets on her head they set,
And lilacs white upon her breast,
And lilies where her fingers met,
And bore her body to its rest ;
And where a white syringa flowered,
And where white daisies soon would grow,
And white horse-chestnut blooms down-showered,
All tenderly they laid her low.
Serene the sky,
The wind was hushed,
And far and nigh
The sunlight flushed.

That grave is grown a garden now,
And in its midst there stands a cross,
A cross of marble white as snow,
To tell her gain and others' loss ;

To tell how two were strong in faith,
And lovely in their lives were they,
And undivided in their death.

God gave, and He hath taken away.

O power of Hope

And Purity !

For all their scope—

Eternity !

CAREGGI.

“The most bewitching of all the Medicean Villas. . . Its gardens are exquisitely beautiful, and its ancient rooms are full of interesting souvenirs of Lorenzo de’ Medici.”

Augustus Hare.

CAREGGI! ’Twas noon, and the stillness had
brought

Much musing the hour to beguile,
Till alone in the hush of the garden methought
The great and the lowly,
The base and the holy
Of History, passed me in file.

A fountain beside me made musical plash,
Like the sound of a streamlet that flows;
The chestnut in blossom, the lime and the ash,
And every sweet tree
Was a home for the bee,
And the butterfly slept in the rose.

And south on the slope where the fir-trees stand
wide,
And the vineyards stretch level and green,
Fair Florence, the banks of her Arno beside,
With dome and with tower,
Her marvellous dower,
Stood filling the spaces between.

The silence was broken by voices that spake
As we speak by the sick or the dead,—
Low murmurs and terrified whispers that take
Their tone from despair,
Or the presence upstairs
Of the angel of Death by the bed.

They said : “ ’Tis a portent,—the finger of Fate ;
Behold ! the Magnifico dies,
And the Frate will come (so he prove not too
late)
And on him shall devolve
That perforce he absolve
His foe who in penitence cries.”

He came, Fra Girôlamo, straight from his cell,
The Monk of St. Mark's and its Prior,
Dust-covered and breathless (I noted him well,
The lip and the jowl,
And under his cowl
The eyes that were flaming with fire).

And as he was crossing the garden and court,
And as he ascended the stair,
The murmurs, the whispers, stopped suddenly
short,
His presence seemed felt ;—
Some bowed and some knelt,
And all wore a reverent air.

One hand on his breast and the cross on his
mouth,
He passed where the Medici lay ;—
The window stood open that faced to the south,
And curtained with red
The richly-wrought bed
Kept a shade from the glare of the day.

Arms carved at the foot and again at the head,
Silk coverlets, gilding profuse ;
Politian for converse and Plato to read,—
Mirandola's wit
Lambent light to emit,—
Ficino to soothe or amuse ;

But the wit and the learning seem run to an end,
The doctrines of Plato are dumb,
And the Medici dies ! and with yearnings that
tend
Towards the faith that can only
Give hope to the lonely,
He asks if the Frate has come ?

Alone in the chamber that looks toward the
south,
Together that wonderful twain ;
The dying Magnifico, reared from his youth
To temper his mind
With a logic refined,
And the Monk preaching Christ as his gain.

"Oh, Father," he pleadeth o'ershadowed by Death,

"For me is there mercy above ?

Though my sins they be many, yet great is my
faith,

But sore on my soul

Lies the weight of the whole

That the Church, only she, can remove."

The Frate knelt down with the cross on his lip :

"God's mercy is boundless," said he.

"Then absolve me my sins ; nay, the swift
moments slip,

And I die all unblest

So they stand unconfessed,

The worst and the weightiest three.

"Volterra I sacked in my vengeance." The Prior

Made answer : "God's mercy is great."

"The orphans I spoiled of their dower ; I desire

For this thing whercin

I did mortally sin

Forgiveness. Oh, Father ! I wait."

“ No limit is set, so be penitence plead,”
Said the Monk, “ to the mercy of Christ ;
For this did He suffer, for this did He bleed,”
And the emblem divine
He uplifted in sign
That the faith of the sinner sufficed.

“ And the blood of the Pazzi when vengeance was
sweet,
With this let the catalogue close.”
Then the Monk by the Medici rose to his feet,
And his glance was a flame,
And in terror and shame
The Medici shrank as he rose.

“ In proof of thy penitence, God doth require
(And I as His mouth-piece make claim)
Three things in assurance from thee,” said the
Prior,
“ So cursèd or blest
Shalt thou be by this test,
And here I recite thee the same.

“First: Hast thou full faith in the mercy
divine?”

The Medici answered him: “Yea.”

“Then, secondly, wilt thou restore and resign
All riches despoiled,
Wherewith thou hast soiled
And basely disfigured thy sway?”

Long silence that followed! Arms folded, head
bent,

Girôlamo waited reply,
And watched the Magnifico there as he lent
To anger and doubt
The courage to scout
His faith in God's pardon,—and die.

Thus struggled, thus wavered; at length by a nod
Slow yielded extorted assent,
And the Monk his head lifted; his country, his
God,
His Florence, her laws
And her liberty's cause,
For him with salvation were blent.

With the voice of a judge and the glance of a seer,
He cried : " To our City restore
The rights you have strangled ; no compromise
here.

Pardon lieth for thee
In that Florence be free
With all the full freedom of yore."

Yet not for the Frate his triumph that day.
Remission of sins to a foe
On terms such as these ? Away with—away !
'Tis not God, but the man
Of political plan
Who juggles with dying men so !

And lo ! the Magnifico rallies his will ;
His anger, his scorn, aye, his hate
In one speaking gesture of contumely fill
The silence and space ;
Averted his face,—
No need for the Frate to wait.

He passed from the chamber,—no trace of a scowl
Deforming his forehead. I saw
The eyes of a prophet half hid by the cowl,
Yet owning in this
God's dealing, not his,
Past finding, and owning with awe.

And down by the stairway, and out by the gate,
The tramp of his feet on the stone
Fell farther and fainter. The voices that late
In a medley of sound
Had vibrated around
Were silent, and I was alone.

Alone in the garden. The stillness and hush
Lay heavy and hot in the noon,
Till over it all broke the note of a thrush
Far off in a beech,
With the tremulous speech
Of a spirit appealing. But soon

It ceased, and the silence lay low on the air.

The window stood wide to the sun,
But where were the Monk and the Medici, where ?
Was it only a dream
Of historical theme
My reading and musing had spun ?

Yet the City stands there with her great dome of
red,
And her marvellous marble-white tower,
Old treasures that day when Lorenzo lay dead !
Spite of centuries' flight,
Still the same in my sight
As in his ; and the years seem an hour.

I only had dreamed ? Who may dare to decide
On the limit of sound or of sight ?
But I know in the hush of the sweet summer-tide
How these shades may beguile
Our poor thoughts for a while,
And a vision such thoughts can requite ;

And the vision must be at Careggi, but this,
Where the Medici presence is stamped
On the stones of the courtyard and stair. Would
ye miss

All the sweets of a spell,
O my brothers ? 'Tis well
To loosen our memories cramped,

And let them fly back with the speed of a shaft
To the figures removed from our ken,
Bring them nearer by this, and confess : As they
laughed,
As they trampled and fought,
As they suffered and taught,
That the Now joineth hands with the Then.

THROUGH THE YEARS.

A Tale told in Ten Letters.

“The tragedy of the mirror is for a woman to write.”

George Meredith.

LETTER I.

DEAR FRIEND, far off in other hemisphere,
 Who led me, erst, a wayward child along
 A misty way, and made its darkness clear,
 And taught me many truths, I hold you wrong
 On this sole point : For Life, you said, is sad.
 I do not find it so ; my days are glad.

My days are full of sunshine, and for me
 Whatever cometh brings a new delight ;—
 The primrose copse, the blossom on the tree
 That clothes the orchard slope with pink and
 white,
 The summer roses and the scent of hay,
 And summer evenings made for dreams or
 play ;—

The woods in autumn when the red and gold
Shineth athwart a floating veil of blue,—
Aye, winter landscape when the year is old
And trees are brown and bare, I love it too ;
For when I feel my horse's straining neck,
Let the world go ! It is not I who reck !

Sad ? Never think it ! Life is one long dream
Of ecstasy and pleasure following pleasure ;
Even in my working hours I do but scheme
Some new amusement, and my frequent leisure
Is filled with pastimes of such varied guise
As those who love me in their love devise ;

To thrill my senses with sweet melody,—
To dance till all my pulses beat for bliss,—
To sport in merry games. " Ah, butterfly !"
I hear you say. True, I was chrysalis
When last you saw me, and I nothing knew
Of wings and sunshine and the rose's hue.

But I have waked since then, and now I know
The taste of honey and the scent of flowers,

And I have found these do the richer grow
If they but take their fill of sunlight hours.
So at the worst, I only do as they
To bask in all the golden light I may.

Forgive me if I seem to contravene
The experience of your wider knowledge, Dear ;
But I am young ; I am but just nineteen,
And so I find not gladness now, 'tis clear
I never shall, if what you say be true.
You would not grudge my happiness, not
you ?

It is so sweet to live ! Not that I care
For all the homage that my youth has won,—
To hear the praises of my golden hair,
When fond enthusiasts match it with the sun,
Or know there is "a subtler charm in grace
Than in the beauty of the fairest face,"—

For this I do not care. But just to live
And feel the keenness of enjoyment's power,
Is sweet ! For aught the Future has to give,
I do not ask. I take the Present hour
At its own value ; 'tis enough for me,
And what may come hereafter, let it be.

LETTER II.

Nay, spite of all you would prognosticate,
I am not weary of the sunlight yet ;
I have not fallen on a ruder fate
Than by a smiling lip may well be met,
And still I find delight in novel things,
And still I love to feel my tireless wings.

And if I choose that they shall fit their pace
To match the measure of another's speed,
In this my choice I do perforce but place
A wider circle round my nature's need ;
My life shall still be full of joy, I know,
For one has pledged his love to make it so.

One at my side to feed mine every whim !
One going before to lay the rose-leaves down !
One who, whatever others deem, for him
My golden head will always wear a crown !
One who will kneel and thank me all his life
For the sweet privilege to claim me wife !

And I have seen the beauties of a dream
In our new wanderings ! sunsets o'er the sea,

And purple mountain peaks, and the first gleam
Of morning on the domes of Italy !
And revelled in the magic greenery made
By olives with the cypress overlaid.

And I have gathered up old poets' tales,
Taught by the very statues of the streets,
And gazed on shrines beside whose glory fails
The noblest work that modern art repeats,
And I have felt my spirit stirred to pity
O'er the lost treasures of an antique city.

And everything I feel is new and strange,
And yet this very strangeness brings delight !
Nay, Friend, I have not touched the outside range
Of varied bliss that makes my being bright,
And so a shadow came for me in quest,
He who doth love me would not let it rest.

And when he whispered only yesterday,
Fondling my hair : " I would not lose this gold,
I would not lose it, Darling, come what may,
To win the riches mountain mines may hold,"
For all I laughed, I felt the thing was sweet
To bind him so in fetters at my feet.

LETTER III.

You ask if I am happy. Wherefore, Friend?

What have you heard that you should doubt or
guess?

What have I said that likelihood may lend

To tales of something spoilt? True happiness
Just missed? Yet since you ask, for old sake's
sake

Some answer to your question must I make.

So, am I happy? If by things possessed,

And wealth in many forms, and gifts down-
showered

Before her feet, you count a woman blest,—

By pride in knowing she is richly dowered

With good for which her fellows pray and pine,
And weep and work, then happiness is mine.

Leisure have I the lovely side of life

To cultivate, to breathe it and enjoy ;

With careful hand he who doth call me wife

Puts back whatever cometh to annoy,

Nor wills that aught save fair and sweet and
kind

About my daily pathway I should find.

And I have friends, more than I care to claim,
And homage for my beauty and my wit,
And comfort, till I sometimes deem it shame,
While others toil, that I should idly sit ;
And when I look into my children's eyes,
I almost feel I grasp the perfect prize !

Love in our lives ? Why, mine holds nothing less,
Heaped on my head and laid beneath my feet,—
Love that protects, and love whose happiness
Is simple adoration ; love replete
With self-denial, and passionate love that
yearns,
Yet humbly is content with scant returns.

And yet, (needs must I seem a thankless fool !)
Despite this good, my life stands incomplete.
When all is said and done, 'tis Nature's rule
That we her creatures each in turn shall mete
The measure we receive of gifts, or sicken
For want of what alone makes pulses quicken.

But I mete nought ! The truth I would not shield.

I have been used from childhood until now
To draw unto myself what others yield ;

Nay more, I have been used to see them bow
And pray acceptance, proffering their last
mite ;

So I have taken as one takes his right,

And sit a sovereign on an ivory throne,

And smile my languid thanks ; and yet withal
A pauper I ! For I have never known

Throughout my being's range, part integral
Of me, Love's power demanding scope and
play,

And all my Self controlling by his sway !

Beloved am I, yet have I never loved !

Here is the thing left out midst all my gain,
Here is the incompleteness felt and proved,
That ends in discontent and restless pain.

I cannot comprehend what others feel
While Life withholds one good it might reveal.

At best I seem like one but half awake !

Ah, Friend ! I swear by all my unearned bliss
(Nor lightly nor in haste the oath I make)

I would forego the total sum of this,
So might my soul, if only for an hour,
Lie at the mercy of her passions' power !

A dangerous longing ? Nay, be easy, Dear.

Nature has given me much, yet left me cold ;
The bloom upon my cheek no jealous fear
Will ever ravish, and the burnished gold
That crowns my head, to silver will not turn
In passion's crucible, through fires that burn !

As I have lived, so shall I surely die,

In good old age and lovely to the last !
And much that others bear in agony
Will leave me whole. My lot, I own, is cast
In pleasant places. Only, all such bliss
Is bought by something better that we miss.

LETTER IV.

"Yet have I never loved." I wrote it so
In days of peevish pining, unsupplied
With one supremest good ; but now I know
It were the truth that "never" stood denied,
I pray you cancel it by stroke of pen,
Or better, blot it wholly from your ken.

Aye, now I know ! In one swift lightning flash,
The golden bolt shot through my quivering
frame,
Mine icy outworks fell with sudden crash,
And all my veins seemed filled with flowing
flame.
I was mine own no longer to command,
But I did see and feel and understand.

'Twas summer evening, and a little boat
Bore us we cared not whither o'er the stream,
The air was perfumed and the blackbird's note
Sweet with the added sweetness of a dream,
And we in happy silence side by side
Were drifting downwards on the shimmering
tide.

What recked I watchers from the sloping shore
Would check our course by warning word or
sign ?

I only saw the golden sky before,
I only knew whose hand was laid in mine,
And that we cleft a dazzling pathway,—one
That led us westward towards the sinking sun.

Say not the gold must turn to ashen grey !
Say not such love is but a passionate dream,
That twilight hovers where the sunbeams play,
And only madness guides the boat down-stream !
Is it not good beneath the opal skies
To read the love within another's eyes ?

To read and understand the message writ,
And feel response awake, is this not gain ?
To read and understand and answer it
With self laid down and for another slain ?
Is this not good ? A precious, priceless gift ?
What matter then if rudderless we drift !

Oh, Friend ! who filled an elder sister's place
In patient tenderness to me, a child,
Bear with me now, I pray, a little space,
If I do seem beside myself and wild,
Like cultured rose that breaks its garden-pale
And lets its bloom in freedom's luxury trail !

If I at last have broken through my hedge,
If I have laid my roses at the feet
Of some one passing by—even to the edge
Of the near precipice, I do entreat
Call it not folly,—no, nor call it sin !
This new-born power that ruleth me within,

Is surely worthy of a kinder name !
That which hath roused the higher life in me,
You would not scorn it, as a thing of shame ?
And if perchance you say : “ It should not be,”
I answer : “ Wise or foolish, right or wrong,
I am thereby more noble and more strong.”

LETTER V.

I cannot write you much to-day. My brow
Is throbbing fiercely with unwonted pain.
Only, take comfort for the plighted vow
So nearly snapt ! We shall not meet again,—
We shall not meet, I and that other one.
The veil is lifted, and the dream is done.

We shall not meet ! What agonizing strain
Our little lives can bear now have I proved.
To meet and part and not to meet again,
(Just for the very reason we have loved !)
It does not seem so much,—and yet, God
knows,
This may the measure be of bitterest woes !

A tear, you see, has fallen where I write,
Telling its tale ! Oh, tenderest Friend of mine,
Keep that tear's secret. Only souls as white
As yours upon the judgment-day will shine,
Can bless my struggle, whispering : " Sacrifice
Has cancelled error ; shall it not suffice ? "

But there are lips would curl and eyes would flash
At the mere hint of what that tear reveals.
I would not be so simple or so rash
As make that plain which silence best conceals ;
But just from you I plead : " For this my
pain
Absolve me, Dear. We shall not meet again."

And the old life will go its well-worn way,
And I shall keep my throne and smile a queen,
And find my pride and pleasure in such sway,
Nor dare regret aught else that might have
been !—
This morning I did find a silver thread
Amid the burnished gold that crowns my
head.

LETTER VI.

You know the little church beyond the road
Where the briar-roses climb amid the stones ?
There did we bury him. The fields new mowed
Were wet and the wind sobbed in undertones,
And as I stood, a widow, by the vault,
Methought : He had no weakness and no fault !

I have so little else to do just now
But just, with folded hands, to sit and think
How he did worship all of me, and how
The loudest claims of self he loved to sink,
So he might serve me, or might see me light
One of my smiles, his efforts to requite.

But oh ! I was so thankless and so cold !
I took it all as it had been my right,
Yet wearied of my praises oft retold ;
And so I chose to smile, or chose to slight,
Patient was he with me. Perchance too kind ;
His faith was perfect and his love was blind.

Why did I never love him as I might ?
Ah ! you would say, I loved myself too much,
And only prized his homage in my sight,
Because this Self seemed flattered by the touch.
This was it to begin,—and in the end,
You know what made it harder, Oh my
Friend !

Ah well ! the golden days of life are dead !

The crown of gold his hand will never set
(Nor any other hand) upon my head.

That golden days have been, 'twere best forget.
And the gold hair he kissed above my brow,
Sweet, you would weep, could you but see it
now.

It seems so long, so very long ago

Since I was young and played the butterfly.

Oh ! for the sunlight and the fervid glow

Of wings in motion ! Is it really I
With these white weeds of woe about my head?
Ah me ! the golden days of life are dead !

LETTER VII.

I am more happy than I ever thought

That I could be again ! The light burnt low
Has swift rekindled, and my life has caught

Flame from a smouldering spark lit long ago.

For I have seen him, he has touched my hand,
Gazed in mine eyes ! Dear, do you under-
stand ?

Where did we meet ? My memory is dazed
With so much sudden joy. Somewhere, I think
Where rhododendrons and azaleas blazed
Athwart a sloping sward, and kissed the brink
Of a wide water that returned the blaze
Bright as the glory of the sun's own rays.

A word, a look, a touch,—what wealth of bliss,
What weight of bitterness such things can be !
The grief of that dead day, the joy of this,
Circling the sum of love 'twixt him and me ;
But now, the silent years that lie between
Are blotted out as they had never been.

No need for me to pray another's leave,
Nor need to take a sinning soul to task,
And knowing how I love, you will not grieve
Lest love should be but error. I may bask
In the full sunshine of my happiness,
And you, I know, will be the first to bless.

I am not cold or thankless now, be sure ;
I joy in privilege and not in right,
And should his eulogy of me endure
Without a note of pause, I would not slight

The homage or the worshipper therein.
My stake is won ; yet was it hard to win.

Will it be hard to keep ? My mirror's truth
I ask for answer twenty times a day ;
Oh, with what justice, aye, what scanty ruth
That mirror doth mine eager quest repay !
And as I read mine image for reply,
My hopes and fears vibrate and live or die !

LETTER VIII.

The calm content of happiness secured
Is yours ; no irony of circumstance
Can hurl it headlong from its place assured ;
'Tis not the sport of those who look askance
At anything they cannot understand.
Becalmed your ship, yet you have sighted land ;
While I am drifting further out to sea,
Borne on the bosom of the booming waves,
And where they heave and sink alternately
A thousand hopes have found a thousand graves.
Oh Friend, dear Friend ! what would I not
bestow
The meaning of this life of mine to know !

Why have I waited for this best of bliss
Till all my power is gone to hold it fast ?
Why have I loved, so it must come to this
Poor pitiful conclusion at the last ?
I said : " The silent years that lie between
Are blotted out as they had never been ;"

But I forgot the silent years would steal
My treasures from me, bit by bit, the while,—
The perfect curve, the tender bloom, the appeal
Of laughing tones, the dimple of my smile.
I do not say he does not love, but oh !
'Tis not the love I need or I bestow.

The silent years have made me thus bereft,
Yet given me nought my losses to assuage,
For what is gone no compensation left,
Nor power of youth nor privilege of age !
Not young enough for love, yet am I young
If slander shoot the venom of her tongue.

He will not care to ask me as his wife,
For that I am too old ; and as my friend,
To bring a lesser comfort to my life,
Too young am I for that ! Oh ! I could rend

My heart in very fury at the lies
They dare to link with pity and surprise !

If I be old, too old for lover's troth,
Then let them leave my name and fame at rest.
Too old, too young, I must perforce be both,
To suit my torment's exigence ! 'Twere best
To dub me crone at once and set me free
From jealous jibes,—and haply let me be.

Twice in my life to let my loved one go !
Twice in my life to bow my head for pain !
'Tis twice too much. I was a fool, I know,
To sacrifice him then ; for all my gain,
The scorn of those who just because therein
Their love runs smooth, the easier prate of sin !

If you have any wisdom that may fit
The fashion of my suffering, send it, Sweet !
You are so wise that I would welcome it,
And lay my humbled head beneath your feet ;
At least you will not chide as others do,
And mock me with their cruel counterview.

My humbled head ! Aye ! you would never guess
What I could do, so I might keep him mine !
How I could stoop I would not dare confess ;—
Yet not even such as you would quite resign
The uttermost appeal that may be made ;
Even you, for love bestowed, would be repaid !

LETTER IX.

Nay ! tell me not his love has been my curse,
Nor hint 'twere best we twain had never met.
For good or ill, I count it the reverse,
And take my stand thereby. If love have set
Lines on my brow, sown grey amid the gold,
And vexed my mind with torments manifold,

If love have robbed my life of all its peace,
'Tis better so than the old level calm ;
If love shall break my heart, I will not cease
To assert : Love brings its own immortal balm ;
Nor any lesser answer could I plead,
I know, though love at last should leave me
dead !

LETTER X.

Nay, never fear, dear Friend. I shall not die.

For hopes do wither, hearts do break, yet death
Comes none the nearer. 'Tis an old-world lie,

(Do we not prove it day by day ?) which saith :

We live by very reason of our bliss,

Die by our grief. We do not die for this.

So you are coming back. Think you our hearts

Will fix it in a glance 'tis you and I,

For all our lives, their worse and better parts,

Have come between since last we said Good-bye ?

I would believe it. Never tell me change

Which tries us all, is synonym for strange.

Needs must, methinks, you come regretfully ;

You leave large treasures by the western
waves,—

A home where you have laid sweet memories
by,—

A marble record writ above two graves,—

And your heart's pride, your babe whom once
I pressed

Long years ago !—you leave him in the west.

And you will find me mid my comforts set,
Not unblest wholly, if not wholly blest,
Cared for in tenderness and courted yet
By some who love me, and whose dearest quest
Is still to make my life's stream smoothly run ;
While I—I wait for what I have not won.

“ All comes to him who knoweth how to wait.”
Ah ! just therein the trial : Knoweth how.
We do not find, for sure, the aggregate
Of wisest waiting brings fulfilment now ;
Nor could we wait, methinks, did we not
trust
God's greatness and man's clamorous sense of
must.

There *must* be meaning in the current sent
That draweth heart to heart by hidden law ;
There *must* be outcome of all anguish pent,
In silent suffering, up ; else were there flaw
In proved perfection which doth bid us see
No energy is lost, by set decree.

Not lost, but only stored to break anew
In other form and opposite. What then?
'Tis manifest our silent suffering too
Should break in bliss ; only we know not when
Yet so it be not now and be not here,
'Tis surely but reserved for elsewhere.

Leave me this hope. Not you,—for you, I think,
Cling where I cling, and hold my faith with me :
That present life is bound by many a link
To life beyond. Leave me this comfort ye,
So proud of all ye know, ye make your jest
Of aught that fitteth not the critic's test.

But peace ! I will not vex your coming home
With peevish plaint or bitter sidelong thrust ;
'Tis very much to me that you do come,
Waking associations from the dust
Of long oblivion. Dearest, we will speak .
Of days when joy was not so far to seek.

There may be things,—there are,—we would forget ;

There may be things we dwell on night and day,

And find therein our sweetest pleasure, yet

We could not speak of. But our childhood's play

We can recall with merry laughter still ;

It brings no blushes and no sense of ill.

So, I will tell of many wayward tricks,

And you shall cap my memory with your own.

When first I saw you, I was only six

And you were ten. I set you on a throne,

And swore you fealty ; yet I often hurled

Rebellion in your face before the world.

Come then, and we will feel again the throb

Of bliss that thrives unfearing serpent-sting,—

The gaiety never ruffled by the sob

That thwarteth now the sweetest songs we sing,—

The faith that never questions, and the hope

That claims the universe for all its scope.

We will be children, Dear, (so be we may !)
Pillowing our heads on rose-leaves with no
thought
Of yesterdays and morrows.—Well-a-day !
Do winter roses bloom ? Are zephyrs caught ?
Will Time delay one footstep of his track
Because we choose to put the timepiece back ?

Yet come, my Friend, and we will each confide
With tear-filled eyes the sorrows that we know ;
My heart is ready and its doors stand wide
To take you in from tempest, heat and snow ;
And you will teach me, Dearest, will you not,
To patiently untie, not cut, Life's knot !

A LEGEND OF PAU.

HAUNTED, yonder house they show ?

Aye, they tell me so,—

Haunted by the ghost of her,

Who, the chronicles aver,

(When in hideous overthrow

Centuries of guilt and error

Paid their reckoning to the Terror,)

Single victim here in Pau,

Died beneath the guillotine,

All for friendship with her queen!

Standing thus beneath her roof,

Hardly may we hold aloof

From those influences that throw

Chains to link the Then and Now ;

And if we but chose remain,

We might see the dead again,

(So the legend saith,)
See her clad in cloak and hood,
Calm and stately as she stood
Summoned to her death ;

We might hear the rhythmic rap,
As the boards her shoe-heels tap,
We might scent the perfumed air
As she pass from room to stair,
We might hear her dress go sweeping
Down the staircase,—hear the weeping
Of her servants, passing whom
She goes forth to meet her doom,
She goes forth to face her death,—
So at least the legend saith.

Hush ! and let the legend be ;
Here is proof enough for me
We are standing by the dead !
Doff the hat and bow the head.

See yon volume, worn and yellow,
Age has left it dusty,
Rose-leaves made its odour mellow,
Damp has turned it musty ;

'Tis her diary, duly kept.
Mark the very words she wrote,—
See the stain of tears she wept,
When she found no more to note,
That might fitly follow this :
(Writ in bitter grief, I wis!)
"She my Friend and she my Queen
Died beneath the guillotine!"

Aye! the volume holds mine eyes,
Till I straightway see uprise
All that scene of long ago :—
Even life-time's ebb and flow,
Peaceful promise quenched in woe.
Leave the legend ; let it be,
While I tell you what I see.

Through the casement comes a perfume, jessamine
or mignonette,
Fills the chamber, fills the staircase, I can almost
smell it yet!
I can see her, fresh and dainty, clad in muslin,
swathed in lace,—
Eyes perchance a trifle weary, manner born of
languid grace,

Scribbling, as the fancy takes her, in yon yellow
diary,

Noting down with quaint precision little facts that
underlie

Every simple life-time's story,—noting further now
and then,

Horrors done in far-off Paris to her fellow-country-
men ;

Till the gathering influences of that lurid atmos-
phere

Set their seal on lips and forehead,—bitter
loathing, restless fear ;

Less of self the diary noteth, more of others,—
then at last

I can hear across the pages how her tears are
falling fast :

“Died this day upon the scaffold, she my Queen
and best of Friends !”—

Follows here a long hiatus, and the broken record
ends.

Maybe sometimes she reflected, as she watched
the sun go down,

Refuge might be had for seeking, in some country
not her own ;

Should she fly before the tempest,—fly to safety,
fly to ease?

Southward lay the Spanish frontier, southward
stretched the Pyrenees.

Yet, what boots it, ease or safety, if the thoughts
you cherish most

Lie across the mountain-passes? You are but an
exiled ghost!

Did she ponder so, I wonder? Nothing further
standeth writ

In the diary's yellow volume, since her tears had
watered it.

But I see her pacing slowly all adown a prison
stair,

Folded lace across her bosom, filmy powder in her
hair,

Calmness in her stately movements, self-possession
in her eyes,

Such as smote her ruffian gaolers with a sense of
strange surprise ;

She an aristocrat by breeding, she blue-blooded to
the bone,

Shamed them, all against their natures, merely by
her courteous tone.

Last I see her bound and taken, as a felon she
might be,

Through the streets—no charge save this one :
noble birth and pedigree ;—

But the state had done with nobles ! so the people
raged and spat,

Swarmed around with hideous yells and cursed her
for an aristocrat.

Very calmly she moved onward,—just a shade of
fine contempt

In her gaze,—from which the sweetest had not
wholly been exempt !

So I see her climb the scaffold, step that faltered
not nor failed,

Mien that neither changed nor lowered, steadfast
eyes that never quailed

As she raised them, proudly smiling,—and she
blessed the guillotine

That would give her death the same as it had
given her Friend and Queen !

Still, you urge, the generations earned their own
exceeding curse.

True—yet they, the slaughtered victims, if no
better were no worse

Than the thousands who had tampered, scathless,
with mistake and crime.

Mark you, I am not defending scandals that disgraced the time,

Monstrous powers o'er life and labour, hateful
rights of privilege,

Which had pushed an ignorant patience towards
endurance' utmost edge.

Plagues there were that needed purging, tyrant
laws demanding change,

Wail and misery and corruption through the
country's farthest range,

But their willingness to perish for a state of things
effete,—

Courage that could carry its colours in the face of
dire defeat,

And that calmness in the dying,—here was not the
surest sign

That a class (self-styled the upper) it were time to
undermine.

Nay! the peril is no mean one, when a storm is
driving swift,

Straight to steer across the current where the
wreck is going adrift ;

Yet the deed is worth the doing. Certes, 'tis no
splendid thing

To desert a friend down-trodden just because he be
a king !

Friends may claim their friendship's pledges, none
the less that they be crowned,

And you will not save your country at the price of
claims disowned.

Bigots ? Granted ; but these bigots die for that
to which they cling ;—

We, who boast the newer culture, would we die
for anything ?

He who dares to cling to something, better he than
those who wait

Anxiously revolving questions, till all action
prove too late,—

He who dies for love of some one, better he than
those who live

Floating in a mist of feelings with no energy to
give !

So at least to me it seemeth ;—and this thought
will linger yet,

(Though the legend be as doubtful as the scent of
mignonette,

Both perchance a dreamer's fancy!)—linger, while
yon yellow page—

Record breathing this before all : “Other manners,
other age,”—

Brings her back, the high-born lady, gently nur-
tured, free and fair,

Execrated and insulted, dying,—while the people
glare,

Dying calmly, dying proudly, never stooping to
belie

Cause or class or royal friend,—aye ! *glad* to testify
and die ;

For she took her Faith and set it on her forehead
as a gem,

And such Faith, to stand or fall by, is, methinks, a
diadem.

CAMILLA.

I STOOD and watched the waves, four thousand
 miles
 That roll and roll to gain the lengthening
 shelves
 Of shore, each following each, in foaming files,
 Against the rocks to strive and split themselves ;
 And as these rocks I scanned, far overhead
 A woman's name cut on their face I read,—
 Camilla.

The cliff stands beetling out athwart a cave,
 Which, when the tide is low, slopes fathoms
 down,
 And when the tide is high, wave after wave
 Against its polished sides is fiercely thrown ;
 But whether space or water fill the abyss,
 This single, graven word remaineth,—this :
 Camilla.

Distinct, each letter standing out from each,
Albeit no foot can find a hold to climb
Nor up nor down,—no human hand can reach
This way or that, to smooth away the slime !
How came it there ?—and reason as we will,
The mystery of that name confronts us still,—
Camilla !

Was she some beauty of her power so proud,
She set this charge upon her lover's love,
(Like her who once amid a courtier crowd
Flung down, before the fighting lions, her
glove):
“ You love me to the death ? Then let me see
If you will do this dangerous thing for me,
Camilla.”

Or was she one whose life was lived obscure,
Working its daily duties near at hand,
Then once—once only summoned to endure
Some sudden self-devotion, great and grand,
Here, for another trembling on the abysm,
That raised her to the height of heroism,
Camilla.

Or haply, was her cherished life, yet young,
All in an instant by some mischance swept
Straight into space!—and one descending
clung
To crannies where no foot before had stepped,
To carve her tombstone thus;—then back-
ward fell,
Regaining her in death he loved so well,
Camilla.

Strange, solitary name! that telleth nought,
Name, whose existence stands a mystery,
Yet, surely at such hideous peril wrought,
It needs must mark some tragic history,
Lost—lost for any meaning it may bear,
As though no daring hand had cut it there,—
Camilla!

A record,—which is none!—kept fresh and plain
In its keen setting of the salt sea air,—
That takes the eye and stimulates the brain
To fancies wild,—yet irresponsive there

(Like hers beneath the round-towered Roman
tomb,)

Though I should question thee from now till
doom,

Camilla !

And so are they the records that we raise,
To speak of us through Time—as we believe!—
The thoughts embodied in the books men praise,
The treasured art, the changes we achieve !
Ah well-a-day ! The Doer how often lies
Dissociate from his Deed or Enterprise,
As this mute name I leave,
Camilla !

THE STATUE OF JUSTICE.

It stands in the centre of Florence,
 Surveying that point where the street
They call Tornabuoni emerges
 The sunny Lung' Arno to meet,
Not far from the Palace of Strozzi, .
 (Which dwarfs every dwelling-place near,
And where bouquets laid out on the basement
 Are bartered uncommonly dear!)

And there stands in an angle behind
 What is now but a strangers' hotel,
Yet a house one may see in a moment
 Has more than one story to tell,
Whose windows look up to the statue
 With helmet, with sword, and with scales,
While round in the blue peradventure
 A pigeon or jackdaw there sails.

It was here, long ago, that a Countess
 (Precisely her name I forget)
One day at her toilette was tempted
 To language of anger and threat ;
For a necklace of pearls which she valued
 At some quite incredible price,
Was not at her bidding forthcoming,
 Although she had asked for it twice !

She had come very late from a ball,
 And the dress she elected to wear
She found, when she woke, where she left it,—
 Flung over the back of a chair ;
But the necklace she laid on the table,
 Not locking it up in its case,—
The necklace was gone in the morning,
 Where, was not so easy to trace !

But when they had ransacked the house
 From the basement right up to the top,
And again from the top to the basement,
 A hint some one ventured to drop,
Which very soon grew to a charge
 (To its victim's perdition and grief)
How a blush on the kitchen-maid's cheek
 Clearly pointed her out as the thief.

When the loss of the pearls was discovered

Her face had grown guiltily red,

And she gazed on the flags at her feet

And she nothing suggested, they said.

She was friendless, defenceless, an orphan,

And kept for the work of a drudge,

So what chance of redress she possessed

In the matter, I leave you to judge !

But the Countess with kindly intention,

Abjured her : " Confess and restore ! "

And the girl from the depth of her heart

In her terror protested and swore

She would if she could, but she couldn't

Whatever they threatened,—no less,—

She had nothing, no nothing in truth

She could either restore or confess.

So next, for formality's sake,

The case was referred to the court

Of Justice (so-called), which decided

To cut it with contumely short ;

For morals sat loosely, and witness

Was easily bartered for gold,

And the Judge was a pig-headed rogue

Who believed the first thing he was told.

“ Her guilt is as patent as daylight,”

He said, and the fact of denial

Did the prisoner more damage than good

In this farce that did duty for trial ;

So they doomed her to death,—although, mark you,

The necklace remained unrecovered,

No effort of Count or of Countess

Its whereabouts having discovered !

But, led to her death past the Statue

Of Justice, she paused to exclaim :

“ Oh, Justice ! what terrible errors

Men sometimes commit in thy name ! ”

(In language and gesture forestalling

Another far greater than she,

Who spake before Liberty’s image

Her famous apostrophe.)

But Justice, up there in the sunlight,

Whatever she noticed or heard,

Stood straight with her sword and her balance,

And answered to never a word.

Did the scales just vibrate ? Was this meant

As a sign to the watchers beneath ?—

If so, there were none to believe,

And the maiden was led to her death !

But (here I would have you remark
On the irony dealt in by Fate)
A century later or more,
So the story goes on to relate,
Long after when Countess and Count
All no less than the maiden were dust,
And the Judge had discovered how judgment
Springs up to condemn the unjust,

A mason at work on a ladder
(The statue being under repair)
Discovered that necklace of pearls
In the scales Justice holds in the air !
Who carried it thither ? A jackdaw,
Or magpie ? Here history fails ;
And I—I can tell you no more than—
The necklace was found in the scales !

VOICES.*

I STOOD above a torrent as it rolled
 From the great glacier where its toils begin,
 Clamorous, persistent, pitiless and cold,
 Till my whole being wearied of its din.

But sweet and clear above the unceasing roar,
 Athwart the rolling of that mountain stream,
 I heard the mavis' music swell and soar,
 And my soul caught the message of its theme.

It smote upon mine ear like something blest,
 A note of peace amid unvarying strife,
 A pause for prayer—a standing still,—a rest
 Where all around a seething whirl was rife.

Bearing of good and ill a mingled load,
 The heedless torrent knew nor pause nor hush,
 Downward and ever downward on its road ;—
 But upward went the music of the thrush ;

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Upward, like some pure soul, and seemed to say :

“ Ye whom the turmoils of this world beguile,
Do ye seek peace and beauty, yearn to pray,
And think high thoughts ?—Ye must stand still
awhile.”

WE AND THE CHILDREN.

"'TIS but a child," we sometimes say, nor guess
 The children know,
 All our own passions with the selfsame stress
 That tries us so.

Only they count us conquerors, and raise
 In wistful doubt,
 Their eyes to ours for words of blame or praise,
 That we dole out.

For them we wear the crowns we never wear
 For older eyes !
 We are their angels and they deem us fair
 And good and wise !

Alas for what we know ourselves to be !
 We good, forsooth,
 Who make such small account of purity,
 And love and truth !

And take our sovereignty and angelhood

As we had won

The right to rule! Not rather as we stood

Ourselves undone,

Courting revolt as worthier our deserts.

Oh! let us pray

Freedom from self that trammels us, and hurts

Our unearned sway!

THE LAST WORD.

To lose you, Dear, at a single stroke,
And never have time to say good-bye,
And then to recall how last we spoke,
So rough, so bitterly, you and I,—
Too late and I cannot revoke!

Cannot? I can, I will and must,
Those words I uttered they were not true;
I swear with my lips laid low in the dust,
I never meant what I said to you,
When I dealt that hasty thrust.

Was it not hard that the only time,
I ever had given you angry speech,
No pity was by to condone the crime,
But justice snatched you out of my reach,
To a height where I may not climb?

Oh ! my love with the wistful eyes !

Oh ! my sweet with the silken hair !

Oh ! my treasure, my pearl, my prize !

Will you not look on my deep despair ?

(You are so tender and wise.)

Will you not look and assure my heart

Those hasty words that were lightly said

You know were never of me a part,

But the outside harm, of some demon bred,

To leave an eternal smart ?

Will you not listen and give me heed,

And touch my grief with a healing balm ?

Will you not answer my crying need,

And soothe my soul to its former calm ?

Can you not hear me plead ?

Never a single word,—they say,—

Harsh or pitiful, meek or proud,

But lives in the echoes far away ;—

Never a voice, or soft or loud,

But is sounding for ever and aye !

Then alas ! for the word that was lightly said
In the passing haste of a moment's pride !
We cannot recall it ! for ever fled
It will sound in the spaces, undenied,
The same since it once hath sped !

Yet, oh my darling ! if this be true,
Somewhere then in the limitless space,
The words of love betwixt me and you,
They are sounding also—have also place,
And the many must drown the few !

THE DOOM OF CONSEQUENCE.

"The specific stripes may follow late after the offence, but they follow because they accompany it. . . . Punishment is a fruit that unsuspected ripens within the flower of the pleasure which concealed it."—*Emerson*.

PART I.

HILDA AND NORBERT.

NOON, summer noon, and in the pleasant shade
That branching plants and coloured curtains made,
Beside a window where the languid breeze
Came stealing in with breath of blossoming trees,
Norbert and Hilda sat. Not hard to guess
The meaning of their presence each by each,—
Not hard—if passion-speaking eyes confess
The truth ;—not hard if truth be framed in speech.
Yet, passed one step beyond the heyday time
That poets usual deem the lover's prime,
He much had tried, much set himself to do,
A man of work and philanthropic scheme,

A noble nature, born to achieve, not dream ;
Lofty, yet humble, and before all true.
That such a man should love, 'twas manifest
He staked his all,—hope, happiness, and trust ;
And she, whose merest glance could make him
blest,

Into whose keeping all his life was thrust,
She was no child waiting experience' proof,
But one to whom the Past with hard behoof
And no scant measurement had somewhat taught.
“Yet, better so, my loved one,” Norbert thought,
“Since sure am I, deep in those beauteous eyes,
The sympathy bestowed by knowledge lies.”

So thought last night. Now while the luscious
air

Tempered the fierceness of the noontide glare,
'Twixt doubt and wonderment did Norbert scan
Her countenance and mien. The restless pose,
The troubled gaze, the shifting of her fan,
All so unlike the woman whom he knows !
The woman who last evening let him lay
His homage at her feet ; and when he prayed
Her love's assurance in return, her “Yea”
In tenderest, truest accents softly said.

She who so lately owned herself as his,
Wherefore, he questioned should she speak like
this?—

“ Not farther back in time than yester-eve,
With eager eyes that sought response in mine,
You prayed me lay my hand upon your sleeve,
And from the vacant movement of the throng,
Beyond the rhythm of dance, the lilt of song,
You led me where the solemn stars did shine,
And thus betwixt high heaven and silent earth,
Where none but I could hear, of love you spake,—
Love, void of which our life is little worth,
Its richest treasure and its noblest stake.—
Why should you care for me above the rest ?
I am not young,—not as the others are ;
I am not fair,—not with the beauty blest
That shines on guileless brows as shines a star.
True, here before my mirror, I can see
The lustre of mine eyes is potent still,
And yet they speak (nor only speak to me)
Of sorrow, sin, experience—what you will,
Since I have learned, ah me ! by taste and touch
Of good and evil knowledge overmuch !
And *you*—on highest ground I see you stand,
In weal or woe to work your neighbour good,

In reverent worship of pure womanhood,—
A man among a million, great and grand,
With high ideal of all that she should be
The one you love ! Why should you care for *me* ?
I am not young, if innocence be youth,
Nor fair, by cause of purity and truth.”
But Norbert said, with the grave speech and slow
Of one in humble doubt who seeks to know :
“ Not farther back in time than yester-eve,
If love be love, you loved,—or I mistook ;
You met my pleading with so sweet a look,
It seemed response ; and so did I believe.
Nay more. My lover’s confidence was such
I laid upon your lips a lover’s kiss,
And you—you did not shrink beneath my touch,
You did not take my passion’s proof amiss,
And so I seek throughout my conduct’s range,
What I have done that you to-day should change.”

She laughed : “ Grant for the sake of argument,
The thing last night I seemed I also meant ;
Still, wherefore should you deem it hard or strange
If now this morning I should choose to change ?
The cause in you ? Nay, never seek for cause,
Since change in woman works apart from laws.”—

—"Just for the sake of argument forsooth?"

He said; "Why give me flippancy for truth?"

The thing you seemed? There was no seeming,
Sweet.

Grant you have learnt the art of counterfeit,
Grant you can lend those eyes what light you will,
Make your hand tremble and your bosom heave,
You cannot bid a beating heart be still;—
You loved, not farther back than yester-eve.
What have I done?"

And suddenly there swept
Over her mood a change, and Hilda wept.
"What have you done? Nothing; I stand reproved,
Plead guilty to the charge of flippancy;
I did but follow as the impulse moved,
I did but hide with silken drapery
The cupboard where my skeleton lies locked.
Lest truth should out, forestalling truth, I mocked.
It is not you have wrought the change, not you—
Nor have I changed. I only see anew!"
And he, observant of her varying state,
Her misery and laughter alternate,
Asked, "What is this that so can shake your
soul?"—

—She said, “ My Future in the harsh control
From which my Past shall never set her free !
Oh probing eyes ! why would you also see ?
Oh loyal heart ! why would you seek to know ?
Ask not, for pity’s sake, and leave me so.”
But straight across her pleading speech he broke,
And with a lover’s proud insistence spoke :
“ I will not leave you so. ’Tis not the place
Of steadfast love to turn from where he stands ;
Oh Hilda, sweetest ! look me in the face,
Lay loyalty within mine own your hands,
And answer : So I took you at your word,
What then ? ”

And Hilda paused : “ Best so, I think,
To part in mute belief than having heard,
To know,” said she, “ what needs must make you
shrink.”

Her grasp he loosed, recoiling from her side,
And quivering as one wounded may, he cried :
“ Take back your hands : you do not trust my
love !

Yet all the more I pray you fill that pause
Which stays your utterance, so I may prove
My steadfastness. Why should I shrink ? ”

“ Because,
Aye, *just because*,” she said, “ you love and trust ;
Because you hold me in such high belief !
If you should know the thing I am, needs must
Your faith in me would change. Because, in chief,
You hold *my* worth will help your world-work on,
My worth will give you counsel, stimulate
And bring you cheer. If you should feel the
weight
Of all my Past, it would but drag you down ! ”
She waited, watching him ; but he nor winced
Nor colour changed ; and ever unconvinced :
“ So this were truth,” he said, “ you could not
speak
So calm.”

“ Calm ! ” Hilda cried. “ No calm beneath !
Calm as the mountains where volcanoes seethe ;
You will not see them move though earth should
shrick,
And yet the flames within from base to peak
Eat out their heart ! Calm—I forsooth—and now !
Stretch forth your hand and touch my burning
palm,
Lay your strong fingers on my throbbing brow,
So may you rightly judge this seeming calm ! ”—

He took the hand she stretched and kissed it now,
And spake with all the fervour of a vow :

“ Then by this palm that burns, this brow that
throbs,

I plead a lover’s right to bear in part

Your passion’s secret ; let it burst in sobs,

’Twere better so than pent within your heart.

Unlade it, Dear, and lay the weight on me ;

’Twixt love and love there should no secrets be.”—

He kneeled to plead, and in his gaze was writ

His soul’s belief. And thus she answered it :

“ There should no secrets be ? I feel it so,

Nor dare I add this sin to all the rest,

Either to take your love or let it go,

With all my woeful story unconfessed !

Leave me awhile. Needs must that I collect

My scattered senses for this retrospect ;

Leave me, dear love ! Yet, prithee kiss me first,

While yet belief and love together yearn,

For when, confession made, you know the worst,

Both will go hence—nor evermore return ! ”—

—“ Lest you should doubt my truth, I take your will

As law, since sure I am you will fulfil

Our pact of trust, by this pledge given,” he said.

And on her quivering lips his own he laid,

And, with the tense passion of a dumb despair
She took his kiss. And thus he left her there.

Then in her loneliness she cried : " And this
Is what they mean who speak of Nemesis !
No public judgment's doom,—no poignard thrust,
No plague to blister and no stricken sense
To lame my life through all its days ;—but just
Sin's punishment by simple consequence !
The sweetest thing in life, too sweet for speech,
Lies at my feet and all within my reach,—
The love of one so noble and so great,
His love is honour—love to dominate
My lower self, from which my best may learn,
It is my prize, my privilege, to win
Such love as this ! Such I perforce must spurn
Because I dare not link it to my sin !
How shall I find the strength to break the seal
That keeps the truth, fain, fain I would conceal ?
I cannot speak, and watch his noble lip
Curl with the scorn that braves the torture grip ;
I cannot write ; the very pen I grasp
Would bite and burn and poison like an asp ;
Nor dare I—he being what he is—revoke
The thing I said and leave the truth unspoke !

Unspoke? Nay verily, methinks the truth
Stands written down long since, (or I forget,)
A running record of my fervid youth
Kept day by day, and I possess it yet,—
The helpless plaint, the love, the sin, the doom
Of conscience-pangs and hopelessness and gloom
Of outer dark! Aye, I will send it him,
That he may read—and having read will give
His judgment as men give it; no reprieve.
So shall my cup be flooded to the brim!

PART II.

A FRAGMENT FROM HILDA'S DIARY.

Lourdes, January 28th.

OH dreary days! Oh dreary widening weeks
Of dull routine!

Here, only on this page, my true self speaks,
And weeps between.

Bound to a bigot who his weal ensures
By candles lit,
In servile faith that miracles and cures
Will follow it;

Who lays a silver heart in gratitude
 On Mary's shrine,
 Then coldly prates, as if he understood,
 Of things divine.

A silver heart forsooth ! and I have here
 A heart of flesh,
 That burns and beats and pines for atmosphere
 More free and fresh.

Food ! give me food for my poor hungry heart !
 You freely own
 When men ask bread, he plays a cursed part
 Who gives a stone.

What has he given to me ? The right to bear
 His name and title ?
 I would at any price, for love, forswear
 A thing so idle !

What has he given ? The right to spend his gold ?
 Content were I,
 So love but warmed my life, with crusts and cold
 And poverty !

And I—what have I given ? My fresh, young life
Of innocence,
With mingled wonder, hope, and impulse rife,
And yearning sense !

When we are young, and Love awakes and sings,
And Hope beats high,
It is not noble names nor wealth of kings
Can satisfy !

II.

Lourdes, *January 29th.*

I wander forth, and everywhere
On left hand and on right,
Before, behind, the selfsame ware
Is spread to tempt my sight ;

The rosary, the crucifix,
Our Lady—sold for greed ;—
No thought of God, but priestly tricks
That traffic in their creed,

With rich and poor in league ; their mission
 (Since thousands flock beguiled)
To preach, for gain, the doubtful vision
 Of an epileptic child !

My soul is sick ! my mind recoils
 From all this hollowness,
And Doubt, that holds me in her toils,
 Cries : What hath power to bless ?

What hath the power to fill the heart,
 And satisfy its claim ?—
Love ?—Haply,—so in me Love's part
 Outstripped the simple name !

III.

Lourdes, *February 1st.*

To-day I left the sordid town,
 And held mine aimless way
Until I reached a gorse-grown down
 Where little children play ;

Brown boys,—a lazy watch who keep
Between the bleating goats
And scattered flocks of fleecy sheep,
With bells about their throats.

Stretched in a sheltered grassy cleft,
I lay and watched the sun,
As slowly in the west he left
The mountains one by one.

The valley first left grey and cold,
Then drew his burning beams
In lessening strips of red and gold
Along the mountain seams ;

Till all was cold and all was grey,
Except one silver peak
Of burnished snow, where round it lay
A single crimson streak.

“That is the gate of Heaven !” I cried.—
But like a barrier rude
Betwixt me and the mountain-side
A border-fortress stood.

Reared on a rock, it seemed to mock
The very hope of light !
I strove to shut the iron block
Out of my straining sight.

Fain had I seen and only seen
The golden and the red,
The bright Beyond with no Between
To take my gaze instead.

Oh rock-bound tower ! I saw it loom
The symbol of my fate !
For me, for me, the prison's gloom,
And not the Golden Gate !

IV.

Pau, *February 4th.*

It was last night. I know not how,—
(And yet the impression liveth now),—
Love touched me on the lips and brow ;

Love laid his hand upon my cheek,
Love loosed my tongue and bade me speak,
And language was not far to seek.

I was a unit in a throng,
Alternate rhythm of dance and song
Drew me in ecstasy along ;

My pulses to the measure beat,
And simple movement was so sweet
I felt as wings were at my feet.

Till swift betwixt the fall and rise
Of sound, *one* looked me in the eyes,
And all my being did recognize,

Throughout its senses' utmost range,
The consciousness of sudden change,
With revelations sweet and strange.

V.

Pau, *February 5th.*

We have been roving far and wide
Over the wooded mountain-side,
In all the liberty untried,

Of careless children free to play!
With aimless feet we held our way,
And none was near to say us nay.

Ah me! the golden glorious weather!
The flush that swept across the heather!
The blue above!—we were together.

It was so sweet to catch the peal
Of buoyant laughter; so to feel
All do not case their souls in steel.

It was so good to free the tongue
From studied curb, for once be young,
And chaunt the lays too long unsung!

To speak as friends may.—each with each,
And feel what lies beyond the reach
Of any commonplace in speech.

No word of love he uttered; yet
I felt its power toward me set,
Whene'er our eyes together met.

And when we parted on the sill,
For all the sun was shining still,
The world for me grew dark and chill.

And I to-morrow must go hence!—
Ah me! what means this added sense
Of desolateness so immense?

VI.

Lourdes, *February 8th.*

Within the hollow of a wayside hedge
A primrose constellation did I espy,
A fragile hostage given by Spring as pledge
She would redeem her promise by-and-by ;—
“Dear child,” it said, “she cometh ; haply
late,
But yet be sure she cometh. Only wait.”

And next I found within a leafless cleft
Of branches twain, a little song-bird's nest,
So cunningly devised no fingers deft
Could twist it so ; and this my ramble's quest
Spake also unto me : “The linnet's home
Is ready for the Spring, and she will come.”

Ah me ! what boots it that you set your flowers
In every hedge and every field, oh Spring !
What boots it that through all the morning hours,
And when the twilight creeps, your songsters
sing,
And fling abroad the message that you come,
If human hearts receive you dead and dumb !

VII.

Lourdes, February 10th.

This evening by the stream I stood
In desolation's lowest mood,
That seeth nowhere any good :

And watched the river onward wend
By force of law, so bound to bend
Its current towards the destined end ;

And cried : " Our wretched lives are so ;
We cannot change or check their flow,
They go but as they are ruled to go. "—

And even as thus I spake aloud,
A light broke through across my cloud,
And lifted up my head that bowed.

Five paces off I saw him stand
With smiling lips and outstretched hand
And eyes my countenance that scanned !

He—Leolin ! His shining eyes
Seemed half to shun and half despise
What I might speak in my surprise ;

Seemed half to plead and half assert :

“You are too kind to do me hurt,
And scorn is not my true desert ;

“For I have come to seek for you ;
And since you hold this doctrine true :
—We do but as we are ruled to do ;—

“You cannot rightly give me less
Than pity ;—nay, in kindness
Forgive the folly I confess !”

VIII.

Lourdes, *February 17th.*

Oh Leolin ! You were the first
To show me, so I only durst,
My lovelessness might stand reversed !

Oh Leolin ! You make me think
With *you* 'twere sweet to swim or sink,
With you I could o'erstep the brink,

That cuts the solid ground beneath
My feet ; with you could hold my breath,
And chance what may of life or death,

And chance what may of others' scorn !
Since better never to be born,
Than live in loneliness forlorn.

Yet Leolin ! Oh Leolin !
Your love that was so sweet to win
I keep but at the price of sin !

* * * * *

IX.

Lourdes, *March 10th.*

Fate has betrayed us—and the twain have met—
Man's outraged right,—man's passion fiercely
set !—

And I am widowed now—and Leolin
Beareth the burden of a double sin !

“ For this my deed, needs must I fly,” said he,
“ But you, dear love, how will you answer me ?
Can love live stronger than the doom of guilt
That haunteth him who human blood hath
spilt ? ”

I said: "I will not turn from love's behest,
It is my gain, though further dispossessed ;
For you are mine ; and so I take your pain,
To brave the peril and despise the stain."

* * * * *

X.

Biarritz, *April*.

We fled as malefactors fly,
At dead of night and silently ;
The priestly garb was our disguise ;—
So changed before each other's eyes
We stood, that none had surely deemed
We could be aught save what we seemed.
We shunned the accustomed track of trains,
We shunned the open road,
And fled by unfrequented lanes
That only peasants trod,
Our sole desire that we might gain
Some lonely pass from France to Spain.

There is a hamlet in a pass
That fronts the Pyrenees,
A God-forsaken spot alas !
Where rocks and giant trees

Have close combined to impose as doom
The sentence of eternal gloom !
Three days we journeyed, till at length,
With aching limbs and failing strength
We joyed to find our chequered lot
Had brought us to this rugged spot.
" Eight miles beyond," said Leolin,
" And we the frontier line shall win.
Eight miles beyond and we shall be
On Spanish soil,—and safe and free ! "

Ah me ! the bitter wind that blew !
Ah me ! the falling flakes of snow !
The narrow defile darker grew,—
We might have read the coming woe.
But all impatient of our fate,

 We sought the mountain-guide,
And roused him, pleading passionate,
 And would not be denied.

He was a man of sullen front :

 " The pass is closed," he said,
" And those who brave the tempest's brunt,
 Are numbered with the dead.
I have a child, I have a wife,—
I do not risk, for priests my life ! "

And so he turned upon his heel,
To close the door on our appeal.
But when we wildly urged again :
" Yonder," said he, " the road to Spain,
Yet mark me well—that traveller dies
Who such a road, this season, tries,"—
Then wheeled about and went within
And left us—I and Leolin !

I took his hand : " Love, let us go,"
I said, " your only safety so ;
'Twixt nature's war and man's pursuit,
She surer may our doom commute !"

* * * * *

No shelter above, no shelter below,—
Only the pitiless wind and snow,
Only the storm in its deepening black,
Only a forest devoid of track,
Only the pitiless snow and wind,—
Our limbs grown stiff and our eyes gone blind !

There, in the lowering shade of the pines,
My Leolin lay on the brushwood and spines,
Dying alone in the nethermost night,
Out of my hearing and out of my sight !

Out of my sight—for a darkness, felt,
In the aisles of that wilderness evermore dwelt !
Out of my hearing,—for round and round
And upwards and onwards the deafening sound
Of a hurricane carried his moaning weak,
To scatter it far on some mountain peak.
I knew he was dying ; yet crouching there
I could not tell him my heart's despair !
At dawn of the morning I knew he was dead,
And our last farewell had never been said !

The storm was spent and the wind was hushed
That over the forest had fiercely rushed,
And a beautiful calm had usurped the place
Of a wasting pain on my Leolin's face ;
Then I felt death creeping from limbs to brow,
And I said in my heart : What matters it now,
That last farewell that we never spake,
So we die together,—together awake ?
And I thought of the poet who saw in hell,
Together, the twain who had loved too well,
Till the scene as some painter had pictured it
Above in the branches began to flit,
And I said ; It is Leolin—he and I,—
And I hungered the stronger to sleep and die !

XI.

They say a dog came down apace,
And stopped where we had stopped,—before
The sleeping guide's close-shuttered door,
And with the instinct of its race,

It spake the best a beast may do,
And scratched the door and barked and whined
So piteously that all devined
The nature of its message true ;

So heeding thus the mastiff's cry
They climbed the mountain pass, and found
Stretched on the sodden forest ground
And dead, my Leolin ! and I ?

I was not dead, would I had been !
I have but fixed a harsher yoke
About my neck than that I broke
In striving thus to contravene

The rights of man, the laws of God ;
For He hath left me to discern
My meed of judgment swift and stern,
Since Leolin lies 'neath the sod,

And I am left to feel within
The torment of my doom instead ;—
The knowledge that my love is dead,
The knowledge that I sinned my sin

To utter waste of any gain
That haply even from sin may spring,—
The hopeless loss of everything
That gives endurance unto pain !

I would have love at any cost,
For life without sweet love is dead,
And so it come to that, I said,
I hold, for love, the world well lost !

And God hath taken me at my word ;
And since I lightly spake of lost,
Hath taught me all the bitter cost
Of recklessness by passion spurred !

I have no home, nor any hearth
Where love may brighten yet my life,
Since I have spurned the name of wife,
Needs must I know this doom of dearth.

I have no hope to help me see,—
I have no peace,—for peace is given
The highest gift to us from heaven,
And heaven hath shut its gates on me.

Of any good I stand bereft ;
Nor have I right to claim as mine
Sweet Pity—human or divine,
That last of boons to sufferers left !

* * * * *

XII.

All last night I lay and tossed,
While my consciousness was crossed
By a thousand voices loud,
And one whisper sweet and low,—
By the faces of a crowd,
Ever changing to and fro,
And one steadfast gaze that burned,
Following wheresoe'er I turned.

Though I courted lamplight's glare,
Still I felt that haunting stare ;
Sought in books a remedy,
Still I saw the crowd go by.

Not an outer sound came in
Through my chamber,—yet the din,—
Solemn judgments, laughter pealing,
Bitter taunts and wailings sad—
Rang around the walls and ceiling ;
All the thoughts I ever had
Seemed to find a shape and tongue
Fitting each, that crowd among,
Yet I could not give them heed,
Could not answer them at need,
While that whisper low and sweet
With soft messages replete,
Now of joy, and now of dole,
Spake and thrilled my listening soul !

All in vain I yearned for peace ;
Yet outside amid the trees
Sang the nightingales ;
So I rose and wildly cried,
Flinging back the casement wide :
“ Ere the moonlight pales,
Holy songsters of the dingle,
Let your tender music mingle,
With these tongues of scorn and hate,
With these whisperings passionate ;

Sing to me, and let your song
Swell above the exultant throng ! ”

Then, athwart the mystic rush
Of their music, fell the hush
When all Nature seems to wait
For her sovereign at the gate ;
And this universal waking
Told another day was breaking ;
Yet another span to face
Fraught with grief, remorse, disgrace,
Void of love and shorn of hope,
Maddening in its narrowed scope,
And with ceaseless pain assailed,—
And in bitter shame I wailed :
“ Not in any beauteous thing
Dare I find delight !

Oh ! ye nightingales that sing
Through the silent night,
Oh ! ye breezes softly creeping
Round the earth to rouse her sleeping,
What is it to such as I,
He, your king, is on his way,
Bringing back the gift of day ?
I would hide mine eyes and die ! ”

Yet the while I lay and wept,
From sheer weariness I slept ;
And in sleeping, visions clearer
Than the widest waking, brought me
Into contact sweeter, nearer

With my fellows. And one sought me,—
One whose face I ne'er had known,
Looked in love upon mine own,
One whose voice I ne'er had heard
Spake in tones my soul that stirred,
And he bowed before my feet,
Pleading, " Will you love me, Sweet ? "
Oh ! his worth so far above me

Stood,—so noble and so great,
It was honour he should love me !

Then I said, " If haply late,
All my life may spring anew
With this man so strong and true."
And my hopelessness seemed over
As I listened to my lover !

But a voice in judgment cried,
And my happiness defied :
" By the trespasses we share,
By the life I did not spare,

By our flight, our fears, our woes,
By my death amid the snows,
Mine you are,—and so you dare
Place your passion elsewhere
I will haunt you with a sense
Of redeemless consequence !”—
 Leolin's the voice that spoke,
 And I shrieked and wildly woke !

PART III.

HILDA'S LETTER.

NORBERT had read, and now he sat alone
 As one in pain, who may not bear the light,
His lips compressed to stifle back the moan,
 And his locked fingers clasped across his sight.
Clear, with the clearness that is cruelty,
 Deciphered lay the enigma of the word ;
“ Oh ! probing eyes, why would you also see ?
 Best part in mute belief than having heard
To feel such horror as must bid you shrink.”
There was no room for doubt. . Yet power to think

Seemed gone from Norbert ; and he only knew
Where reigned Belief and Love, those blessed two
Born in one moment, and together bred,
Love yet was living but Belief was dead !

Love is so buoyant that the atmosphere
 He breathes may less than purest be,
 It will not poison his vitality ;
He is so hardy that his wounds will sear
Though blood flow freely and the bone lie bare ;
Nor truth, nor horror kill him, nor despair.
But beautiful Belief will pale and faint
At the mere whiff of atmospheric taint,
And so Truth deal her thrust but straight and sure,
Belief falls stricken past the hope of cure,
And Love, yet living, wears an altered face,
Missing the sanction of his sister's grace.

Alas for Norbert ! Not for him again
Could Love be aught save a tormenting pain.
His Hilda—*his* ! Yet struggle as he might
 Would come between the thought of Leolin
 With potent claim based on a share in sin,
The guilty passion, and the guiltier flight
That made her complice in a deed of blood !
Now all too clearly Norbert understood

Her words : "You hold my worth would stimulate
Your world-work on. If you should know the
weight

Of all my past, it would but drag you down."

And even as hopelessly he wondered how
His life, reversed, could shape its action now,
There came a letter in the hand he knew,
And Norbert tore and read it eagerly :—
"Dear friend," it said, "I know you so far true,
All you have felt you could not quite belie,
Though anger mingle with the bitterness
Of righteous scorn, and in the poignant stress
Of wrenched belief, there come a burning shame
That you have honoured one of tainted fame,—
Though what alone ensureth peace,—whole trust
Lie bruised, defiled and broken in the dust,—
Though what hath been can be no longer, yet,
Since you have loved, and Love will claim his debt,
I know your honour too immaculate
Or to disclaim, or to repudiate.
Such as I am (for all you knew it not),
You gave your heart and all yourself to me ;
Such as I am (for all the acknowledged blot)
The gift remaineth mine. So let it be.

Stripped, humbled, more than ever dispossessed,
Condemned to penitence that bids me hide
My face from yours, this privilege, this pride,
Lightens my life, nor leaves me too unblest.
I ask no more. But if, oh, true as steel!
You tell me (as I almost think you might),
“Who loves, loves evermore ; and what we feel
Stands all apart from what we judge,”—despite
Such dictate of your truth and nobleness,
I answer with refusal, none the less.
Who loves, loves evermore ? Aye ; grant it true,
So our love’s object be what we believe ;
But what if we discern : “ It was not *you*
To whom I pledged my promise yester-eve.
Athwart my drowsy eyes, perchance some Puck
Did rub his juice : or maybe that I dreamed,—
I know not. Yet I would not link my luck
With one so foreign to the thing I deemed.”
You do not think it now ? Aye ; but you would
For certain by-and-by,—and doubts would rise,
And I should know it by your altered mood,
And I should see it in your watchful eyes,
And I should feel it even athwart your kiss,
And hear it in your voice :—
Ah me ! even this,

Even hope, so far, is shut beyond me now !
The condemnation of my judge's brow
Not the sweet homage of my lover's eyes
Is mine ! I take the loss and leave the prize.
O noble heart ! forgive me, if you can.
Had I been strong I should have bid you scan
The truth that stains my story, long ago,
Ere yet your love had had the time to grow !
Forgive me for the havoc I have made
With your great life ! Forgive, if I have stayed,
Even for an hour, your progress up towards good,
In noble reverence of womanhood ;
I loved you so for that ! Belovèd one,
Fulfil the noble course you have begun ;
Turn not aside and cry, " I was deceived !
There is no good in woman or in man,"
To keep *me* better, as you have believed,
Believe again—forgiving, if you can !

Farewell ! - a long farewell. I go my way
Out of your life and love for ever. Nay
Ask me not whither ; you would never find.
Yet I shall live, and somewhat I have learned
From hearing you, of duty to my kind,
For love of you, be sure I have not spurned ;

I would not sink or grovel in despair,
Since you have raised me up ; and so you care
To know that this is so, remember it
When memories kind and sweet ideals flit
Athwart your dreaming eyes. Keep my behest,
Nor seek me out ; believe me, it were best,
I trust you here as I in all do trust,
So sign myself,—yours in devotion yet,—
Yours, Hilda,—blame me not in this ; I must—
And having signed this once—farewell. Forget.”

A DEED OF GRACE.

THEY bore three corpses through the crowded city,
And strangers pressed amain
With words of praise and pride, and looks of pity,
To view that funeral train.

“Whom do ye follow thus?” I did enquire;
And whispers by me sped
How only two days back had raged a fire,
And these they bore,—the dead,

Had died to save a household. All the three
Came draped with dingy pall,
But two as flowering gardens were to see,
The third was bare of all!

No rose, no lily, as the others had;
In liberal measure given,
No sprig of jessamine his coffin clad,
No gold-eyed daisy even.

He had no friends nor any one who cared
 To show with lawful pride,
How he among the rest had nobly dared,
 And nobly daring, died.

And as they told me this, the tears did spring
 With sympathetic stress,
To think a heart so brave should be a thing
 Of utter loneliness !

Not many paces off a girl there stood
 Wan-eyed and thin and pale,
Whose daily task it was as livelihood
 To offer flowers for sale.

'Twas all I knew of her, or then or now ;
 They called her Margaret,
And poverty its pinch on lips and brow
 Had prematurely set.

Doubtless that sunny morn she stood in hope
 Fair profit she might win
Of her gay wares,—roses and heliotrope,
 And pinks and jessamine.

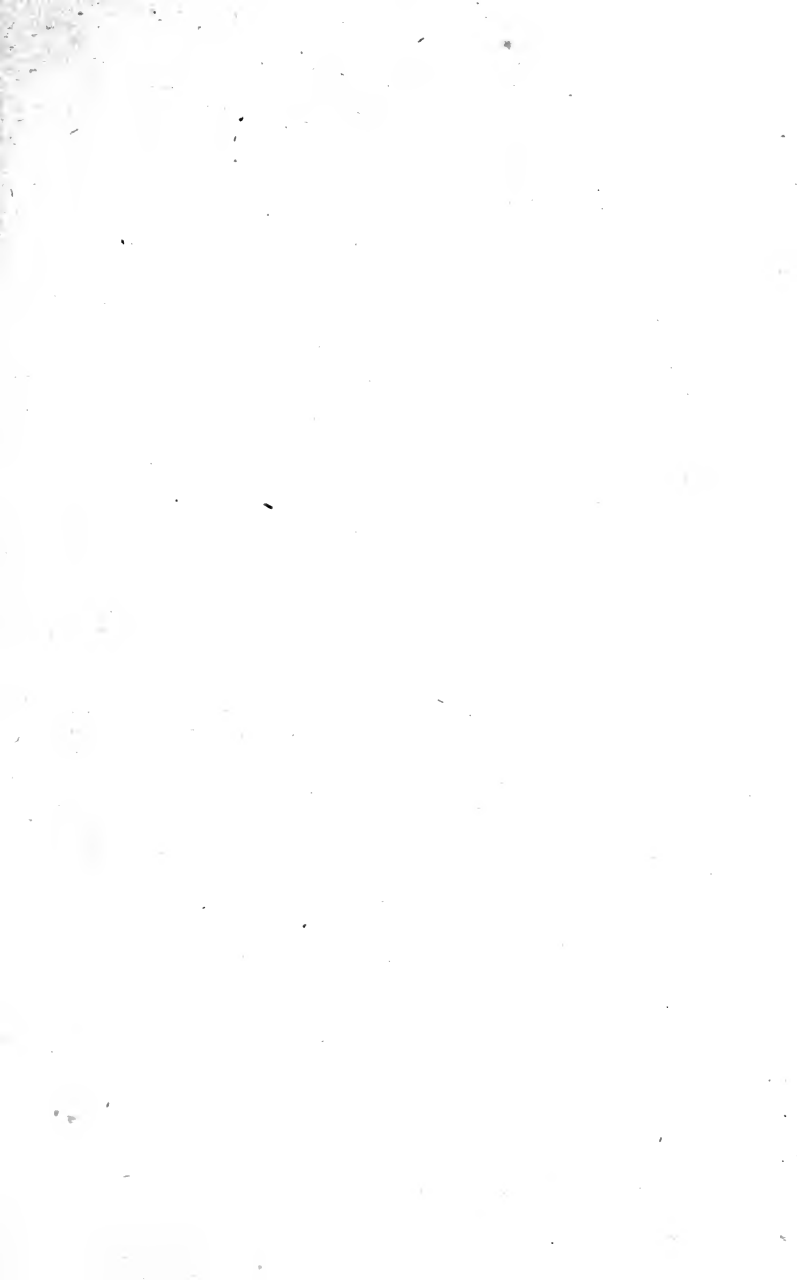
But those slow-moving coffins passed her too,
 As they by me had passed,
And suddenly with kindling eyes, she threw
 Her flowers across the last.

And the rich blossoms fell this way and that,
 Athwart the dingy pall.
Ay! she had done a deed to wonder at,
 For she had given her all!

I saw her basket after; not one flower
 Left hid within a chink;
She flung them every one in that sweet shower,
 Rose, heliotrope, and pink,

And with them flung away her daily bread;—
 Yet by the gift she gave,
(In impulse if you will) the friendless dead
 Went honoured to his grave.

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